

skills outlined in this chapter that allow the critical thinker to appraise the argument itself, shorn of rhetorical devices and other distractions.

What Skills Are Involved in Thinking Critically?

As you now know, critical thinking is more a disposition than a fixed set of skills; that is not to say, however, that you cannot identify certain approaches that will help you analyze an argument—whether that’s part of the process of building your own case or assessing that of the other side in the debate. This section examines some of the approaches that tend to be contained in the process of critical thought. It’s not an exhaustive list, but if you apply these skills rigorously in any debate, you’ll be well on the way to being a more critical thinker and a better debater.

For the purposes of this chapter, critical thinking comprises the capacity and tendency to:

- consider how ideas connect logically to each other
- assess the appropriateness of evidence used in supporting a particular case
- be familiar with common errors in reasoning and logical fallacies
- insist on evidence for even the most apparently self-evident of claims
- subject our own beliefs or claims to the same scrutiny as those with which we disagree
- approach problems consistently
- identify the relevance—or irrelevance—of proposed solutions to a given problem
- identify, construct, and evaluate arguments

Let’s briefly consider what each of these skills actually means before discussing how they are deployed in debate.

Consider How Ideas Connect Logically to Each Other

Ideas that appear to support each other are not always as compatible as they seem. The tendency is to pursue the explanation that is immediately apparent. If one thing is true, another must be false; two things that society tends to put together must be treated as indivisible; entire platforms of thought must be consistent with each other because they tend to be promoted by the same groups or individuals. In reality, none of this is true—life